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C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000380

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SISTANI, SADR OFFER APPROVAL OF ELECTION PROCESS IN MEETINGS  
WITH PRIME MINISTER JAAFARI

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,  
AL-HILLAH, STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

**¶1.** (C) Summary: In separate meetings December 17 with Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani and Moqtada Sadr each expressed his approval of the December 15 election process. In meetings in Najaf, Sistani reportedly stressed to Jaafari the importance of quickly releasing the election results, forming a national government, and ensuring a smooth transition to a permanent National Assembly (NA). Sadr reportedly said that he would only support United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, ballot number 555) candidates for government posts who are in favor of the withdrawal of Coalition Forces, and offered his followers as a nationwide security force in the upcoming provincial elections. End summary.

**¶2.** (C) Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari visited Najaf December 17, where he met with both Sistani and Sadr regarding the December 15 elections. According to sources in Sistani's house, Sistani expressed his approval of the election and his desire to see the speedy release of the results. He reportedly emphasized to Jaafari the need to consider all complaints from competing coalitions, in order to give the election the utmost legitimacy, and to work quickly to form a new government and oversee a smooth transition from the previous assembly to the new NA. Jaafari assured Sistani that there would be a smooth transition, sources said.

**¶3.** (C) Sistani also discussed the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the constitution. On security, Sistani advised the Prime Minister to continue the development of the ISF to protect Iraq and to hasten the withdrawal of Coalition Forces. On the constitution, Sistani expressed hope that the NA would soon resolve outstanding constitutional articles, particularly those relating to federalism, and repeated his rejection of a divided Iraq.

**¶4.** (C) The Sadr meeting, according to Sadrist contacts who spoke to SET NAJAF local staff, was less an audience and more a bargaining session. While he said that he accepted the election process, Sadr said that he would only ally with political entities that favored Iraqi unity and rejected the "invasion" of Iraq by Coalition Forces. Asked by Jaafari if he would support UIA candidates to fill key government positions, Sadr replied that he would only support those in favor of a Coalition withdrawal. (Note: Many Sadr followers ran for office beneath the UIA umbrella in the election. End note.) The new government must be in the hands of "true Iraqis," Sadr reportedly said, and not those serving foreign interests.

**¶5.** (C) Looking ahead, Sadr offered Jaafari the services of his own followers to provide security nationwide, in all provinces, for the upcoming provincial elections. (Note: the provincial elections are scheduled to take place 60 days after the formation of a national government. End note.) Sadr also demanded the replacement of the current judge in Saddam's trial and the execution of Saddam Hussein.

**¶7.** (C) Comment: Sistani's comments, as related by contacts to SET NAJAF local staff, indicate that he remains a detached, albeit interested, observer of Iraq's political development. It would appear from his comments on the election and the constitution that he wishes to continue to exert a subtle, stabilizing force on the nation. Sadr, by contrast, continues to jockey for position in the political process. His qualifications of support for UIA candidates seem to indicate that he continues to act in his own interests, rather than those of the election slate under which some of his followers ran for office. End comment.

FONTENEAU